

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 17858

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJ: SOCIALIST PARTY CONGRESS

1. SUMMARY. FRENCH SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) HELD ITS NATIONAL CONGRESS IN GRENOBLE JUNE 22-24. CONGRESS WAS A GREAT PERSONAL SUCCESS FOR FIRST SECRETARY FRANCOIS MITTERAND WHO CONSOLIDATED HIS CONTROL OVER THE PARTY, ENHANCED HIS IMAGE AS STATESMAN RATHER THAN SIMPLY POLITICAN, AND STRENGTHENED HIS POSITION AS EVENTUAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. WHILE CONGRESS DID NOT RESOLVE ALL FACTIONAL AND POLICY DISPUTES WITHIN PARTY, THE PS TODAY IS MORE UNITED AND MORE CONFIDENT THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE THE EARLY POST- WAR YEARS. SHORT- TERM PARTY STRATEGY ENDORSED BY CONFERENCE SUPPORTS
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CONTINUATION OF LOOSE, TACTICAL ALLIANCE WITH COMMUNIST PARTY (PCF) PLUS ALL- OUT DRIVE TO MAKE PS DOMINANT PARTY OF THE LEFT. END SUMMARY.

2. THE GRNOBLE CONGRESS WAS A MAJOR POLITICAL TRIUMPH FOR MITTERRAND. HIS PRINCIPAL SPEECH, AN EXTEMPORANEOUS TWO- HOUR EFFORT, WAS A BRILLIANT, CONVINCING EXAMPLE OF ORATORY AND POLITICAL MASTERY. IF THERE REMAINED DOUBTS IN ANYONE'S MIND PRIOR TO THE CONGRESS ABOUT MITTERRAND'S PRESIDENTIAL QUALIFICATIONS OR ASPIRATIONS, THEY WERE DISSIPATED BY HIS GRENOBLE PERFORMANCE. THERE WAS CORRIDOR TALK AT THE CONGRESS OF MITTERRAND'S STEPPING DOWN AS FIRST SECRETARY WITHIN TWO YEARS TO BECOME A " NATIONAL FIGURE" IN PREPARATION FOR THE 1976 PRESIDENTIAL RACE.

3. MITTERRAND'S CONTROL OVER THE PARTY APPARATUS WAS STRENGTHENED BY THE CONGRESS' OUTCOME. THE " PARTY PLATFORM" RESOLUTION SPONSORED BY HIS SUPPORTERS WON 65 PER CENT OF THE DELEGATES' VOTE, UP FROM THE BARE MAJORITY WITH WHICH THE MITTERRAND RESOLUTION CARRIED AT THE 1971 CONGRESS. FACTIONS AND POLICY DIFFERENCES NONETHELESS REMAIN. THE MOST IMPORTANT MINORITY GROUP, CERES (A GROUP OF FAR- LEFT, MARXIST BUT NON- COMMUNIST YOUNG TURKS LED BY JEAN- PIERRE CHEVENEMENT) WON SOME 20 PER CENT OF THE VOTE FOR THEIR DRAFT PARTY PLATFORM RESOLUTION. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS WITHIN THE PARTY FOR INCREASED WORKER MANAGEMENT OF INDUSTRY, GREATER SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND IMMIGRANT WORKERS, A MORE PACIFIST DEFENSE POSTURE AND A MORE " SOCIALIST" ORGANIZATION OF EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES. THEY WILL, IN SHORT, TRY TO ORIENT THE PARTY MORE TOWARDS THE NEW STYLE LEFT POLITICS CERES FAVORS.

4. MITTERRAND HANDLED THE CERES FACTION FAIRLY BUT FIRMLY AT THE CONGRESS. HE GAVE CERES LEADERS A VOICE IN THE PROCEEDINGS AND REPRESENTATION IN PARTY COUNCILS COMMENSURATE WITH THEIR STRENGTH BUT FIRMLY SQUASHED THEIR EFFORTS TO STAMPEDE THE PARTY TOWARDS FAR- LEFT POSITIONS. CERES IS IMPORTANT FOR THE SOCIALIST PARTY AS A SOURCE OF NEW, YOUNG BLOOD, ESPECIALLY OF MILITANT- PARTY WORKERS, AND AS A LIGHTNING ROD TO DEFLECT ACCUSATIONS THAT THE PS IS BECOMING SIMPLY ANOTHER BOURGEOIS, IF LEFT- OF- CENTER, PARTY. THE PROBLEM FOR MITTERRAND OVER THE CONFIDENTIAL

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NEXT FEW YEARS WILL BE TO KEEP THE CERES GROUP WITHIN THE PARTY WHILE BROADENING HIS PERSONAL BASE OF SUPPORT TOWARDS THE CENTER; THE LATTER AN ESSENTIAL MOVE IF MITTERRAND IS EVER TO MAKE A SERIOUS BID FOR THE PRESIDENCY.

4. OTHER FACTIONS WITHIN THE PARTY, SUCH AS THAT OF GUY MOLLET,

HAVE BEEN WEAKENED TO THE POINT OF BEING TOTALLY UNABLE TO CHALLENGE

MITTERRAND' S LEADERSHIP . HE THUS EMERGES FROM THE CONGRESS AS THE UNCONTESTED LEADER OF THE PS AND AS THE FOREMOST SPOKESMAN FOR THE ENTIRE LEFT IN FRANCE, CONTINUING TO STRENGTHEN A POSITION HE BUILT UP DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

5. PRESS COMMENT HAS FOCUSED ON THE EFFORTLESS MASTERY OF THE PS WHICH MITTERRAND DISPLAYED. SEVERAL OBSERVERS HAVE NOTED THAT MITTERRAND AND THE NEW SOCIALIST PARTY IN EFFECT HAVE NOTED THAT MITTERRAND AND THE NEW SOCIALIST PARTY IN EFFECT ARE CHALLENGING THE VALIDITY OF ANDRE MALRAUX' S GLOOMY CONTENTION THAT BETWEEN US (THE GAULLISTS) AND THE COMMUNISTS THERE IS NOTHING. INDEED, UDR ASSISTANT SECRETARY, ALEXANDRE SANGUINETTI, ANNOUNCED IN A RECENT PUBLIC SPEECH THAT THE SOCIALIST PARTY HAS BECOME THE UDR' S REAL COMPETITION. THE PCF HAS EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE CONGRESS' PLEDGE OF CONTINUED FIDELITY TO THE UNITED LEFT PROGRAM BUT THE COMMUNISTS ARE CLEARLY WORRIED ABOUT SOCIALIST EFFORTS TO EXPAND THEIR CONSTITUENCY AT COMMUNIST EXPENSE.

6. COMMENT: THE SOCIALIST UNDER MITTERRAND' S LEADERSHIP HAVE CONSOLIDATED A POSITION AS ONE OF THE THREE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN FRANCE, ALONG WITH THE UDR AND THE COMMUNISTS. BUT THE PARTY' S SUCCESS IN THE ELECTIONS AND NEW- FOUND DYNAMISM ARE ALMOST ENTIRELY DUE TO MITTERRAND' S LEADERSHIP. THE PARTY' S ORGANIZATION AND COHESIVENESS REMAIN FRAGILE AND ITS LEADERSHIP COUNTS NO FIRST- RANK FIGURES OF NATIONAL PROMINENCE EXCEPT MITTERRAND. IT HAS, IN FACT, BECOME A ONE- MAN SHOW, A DEVELOPMENT WHICH MANY OLD- TIME SOCIALISTS DEPLORE, AND THERE IS SERIOUS QUESTION AS TO WHETHER ITS SIZE AND INCREASING INFLUENCE COULD BE SUSTAINED IN MITTERRAND' S ABSENCE. THE BEST HOPE FOR THE PARTY, IF IT HOPES TO MOUNT A SERIOUS, NON- COMMUNIST BUT LEFT- WING CHALLENGE TO THE GOVERNMENT, IS THAT MITTERRAND' S PERSONAL CHARISMA CAN BE

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AUGMENTED BY A SOLID, GRASSROOTS INFRASTRUCTURE AND A REASONABLY UNIFIED AND EFFICIENT CENTRAL PARTY ORGANIZATION WITH GREATER DEPTH. THESE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT ACHIEVEMENTS FOR THE PS. THE GRENOBLE CONGRESS REPRESENTS NEVERTHELESS A MAJOR STEP IN THAT DIRECTION.

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